

Where are the Dads?

How might their engagement be increased?

**Challenges and factors impacting the engagement of
non-resident fathers with the child welfare system**

**Presentation to
Wyoming's Children's Justice Project**

**Fathers Engagement Project
State of Washington
Region IV (King County)**

Fathers Engagement Project Collaborative Partnership

- **DSHS Children and Family Services**
- **DSHS Division of Child Support**
- **D.A.D.S. (Divine Alternatives for Dads Services)**
- **Office of the Family & Children's Ombudsman**
- **King County Juvenile Court**
- **Catalyst for Kids**
- **Univ. of Washington School of Social Work**

Presentation and Learning Objectives:

Why this, why here, why now?

- **From research findings it appears that children have better outcomes within and outside of the child welfare system when their fathers are involved**
- **Children have a right to know and have access to their mothers, fathers, and maternal and paternal relatives**
- **Learning objectives**
 - **Learn about the benefits of father engagement**
 - **Gain practice insights to enhance father engagement**
 - **Gain insights from a federal demonstration effort to inform planning and decision making processes**

Presentation Overview

- **Background Information**
 - National Quality Improvement Center Approach
 - Studies and CFSR findings regarding father involvement
- **QIC on Non-resident Fathers**
 - Structure and Approach
- **Findings & Recommendations to Enhance Engagement**
 - Select WA findings on father engagement
 - What fathers value
 - Recommendations to staff
 - Recommendations to agencies, systems, states
- **A Father's Perspective**
- **Available Resources**
- **Questions and Dialogue**

Background on the National Quality Improvement Center Effort

- **1st Quality Improvement Centers through the Children's Bureau was about 10 years ago**
- **Purpose**
 - Gain a better understanding on a targeted issue or practice area within child welfare
 - Stimulate new, research-based responses
 - Inform gaps in knowledge
- **Prior QICs**
 - Privatization, Differential Response, Substance Abuse, Supervision

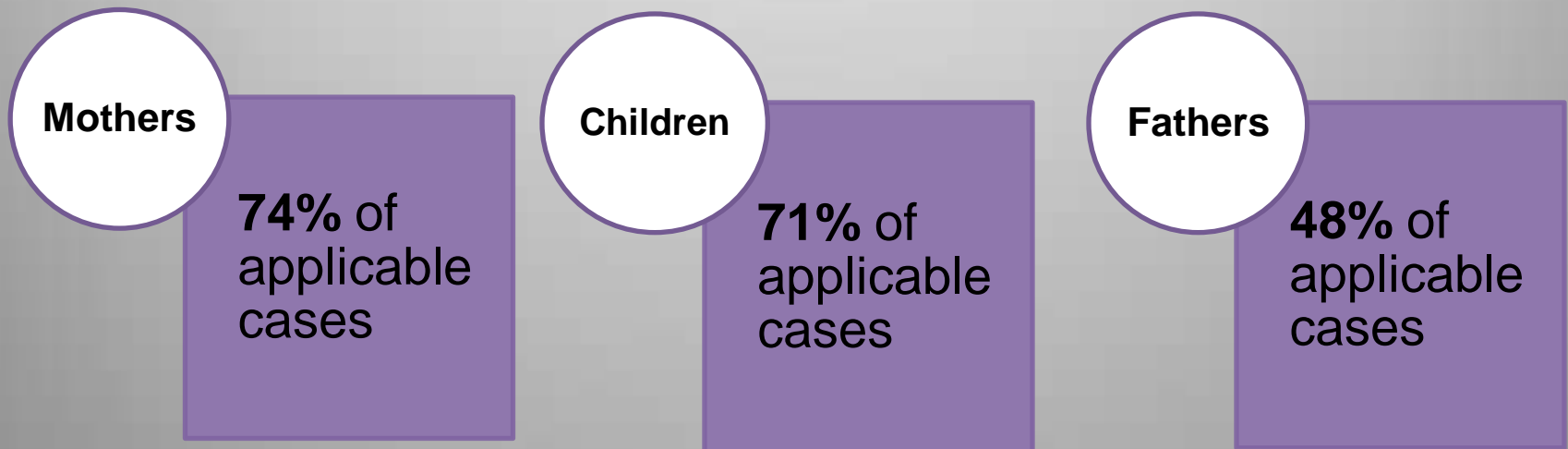
The Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers in the Child Welfare System (QIC-NRF)

- **The QIC-NRF was created because there is little engagements between the child welfare system and fathers**
- **Prior studies/findings influence the QIC-NRF:**
 - Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) Findings
 - What About the Dads: Child Welfare Agencies' Efforts to Identify Locate and Involve Nonresident Fathers (2006)
 - More about the Dads: Exploring Associations between Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Welfare Case Outcomes (2008)

Child & Family Services Review

2007-2008 Case level Findings (32 states; 2069 cases)

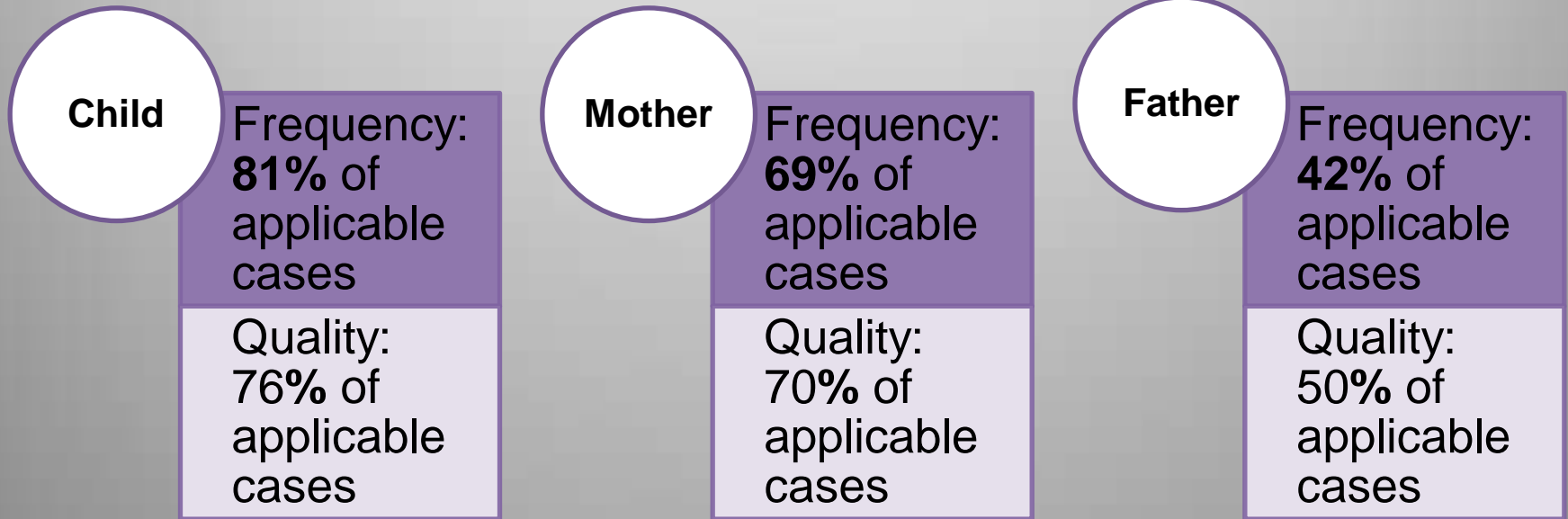
Child welfare agencies' concerted efforts to involve parents and children in case planning:



Child & Family Services Review

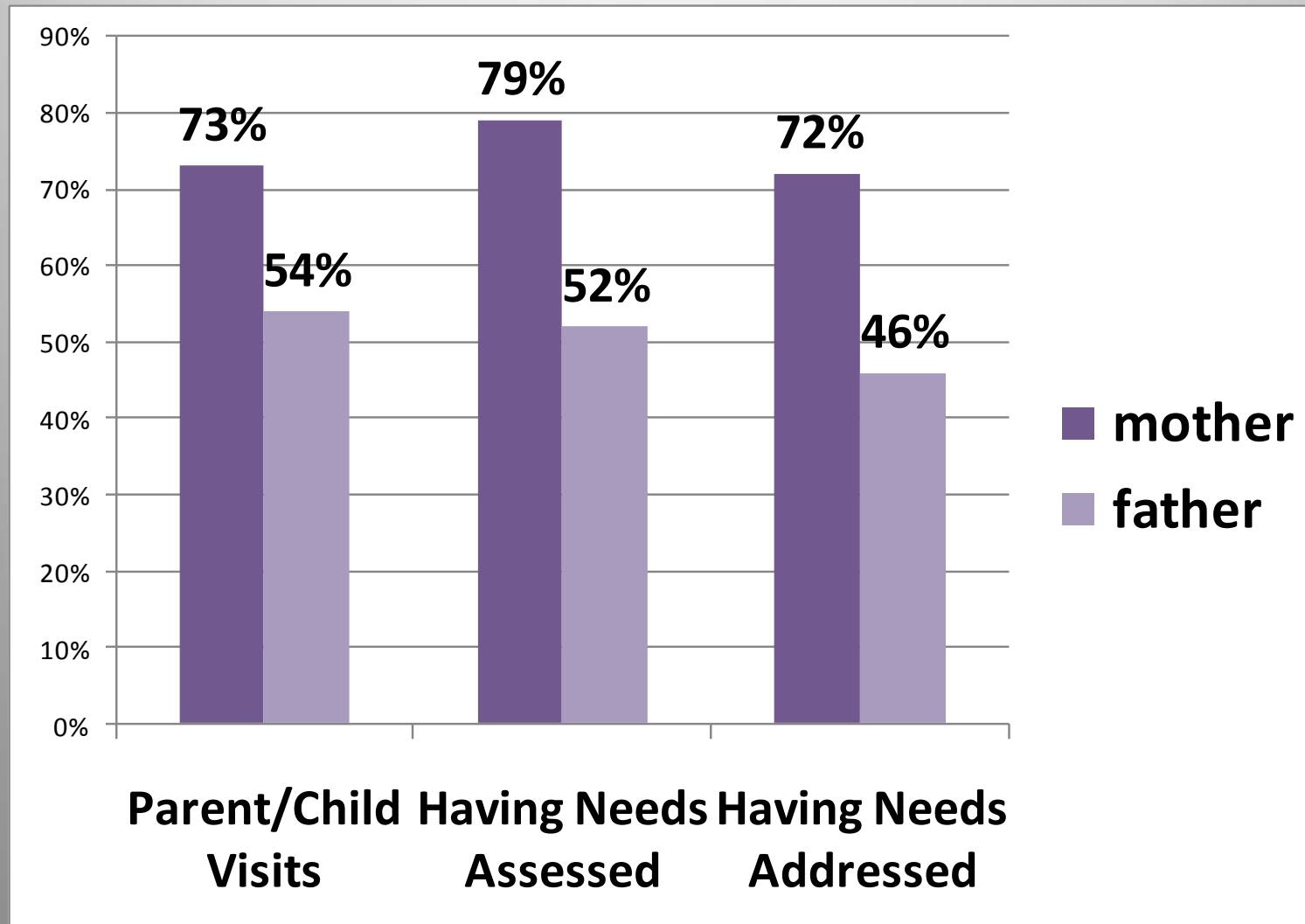
2007-2008 Case level Findings (32 states; 2069 cases)

Frequency of & quality of visits between social worker & family members not equal:



Child & Family Services Review

2007-2008 Case level Findings (32 states; 2069 cases)



What about the Dads?

Findings in the Child Welfare System

- **Workers didn't exhaust all resources to identify and locate fathers**
- **Workers inconsistently asked mothers about the father; mothers often were unable to provide helpful information**
- **Administrators had differing opinions on whether nonresident fathers were "clients"**
- **Differing policies on looking and assessing fathers as a placement option**

More about the Dads...

Findings in the Child Welfare System

- **Children with involved fathers are:**
 - more likely to be reunified
 - less likely to be adopted
- **High levels of adoption for children with:**
 - unknown fathers and uninvolved fathers
 - engagement pattern may indicate fathers are only contacted when the department is moving towards TPR
- **Children whose fathers provide “informal” supports have increased likelihood to be reunified**
 - money for rent, medical support, clothes, day care, etc.

Benefits When There is an Involved Father

General research, not specific to child welfare situations

- **...reduces the rates of criminal activity.** Fathers regulate aggressive behavior, particularly for young boys. Better academic performance, fewer disciplinary problems, and remain in school. *National Fatherhood Initiative*
- Youth are less likely to engage in first-time substance use and ongoing use of alcohol, cigarettes, and hard drugs. *Family Structure, Father Closeness, and Drug Abuse*
- **Girls are more likely to thrive and have increased positive behaviors.** *Unique Influence of Mothers and Fathers on Their Children's Anti-Social Behaviors*
- Teen girls are two times less likely to engage in early sexual activity; seven times less likely to get pregnant. *Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy?*
- **"...responsible fatherhood . . . is one of the most important things we can to reduce childhood poverty."** *Former Vice President Al Gore*

QIC-NRF Population Focus and Program Structure

- **Population Focus**

- NRFs whose child was removed from the home
- The father of the child was not living in the home when the child was removed, was not the maltreating parent, met other criteria

- **QIC-NRF is operated by**

- American Humane Association
- American Bar Association Center on Children & the Law
- National Fatherhood Initiative

- **Four demonstration sites**

- El Paso County, Colorado
- Fort Worth, Texas
- Indianapolis, Indiana
- King County, Washington (greater Seattle area)

- **For more information www.fatherhoodqic.org**

QIC-NRF Goals & Objectives

- **Promote innovative, evidence-based practice**
- **Develop and share knowledge with others**
- **Answer the key question:**

“Is there a difference in child and family outcomes in child welfare cases based on nonresident father involvement.”*

***Child welfare findings on this question will be available after March 2011 since fathers are still being served by all four sites; cross-site findings in about 6-9 months later.**

Research Framework Used by the National QIC-NRF

- Identification
- Location
- Contact
- Engagement



- Literature review conducted AHA found:
 - Biggest gap in practice is in the area of engagement
 - Efforts to working with fathers is not a shared concern or focus, even within good practice
 - No “blue-print” to engage fathers in the child welfare system exist

QIC-NRF Initial and Expanded Focus

- **Initial primary focus:**
 - Field test a 20-week peer-facilitated father support group across the four sites
- **Expanded focus:**
 - Examine non-resident father recruitment and enrollment
 - Examine and engage in cross-system efforts
 - Provide training/skill building to social workers and other professionals

Summary of Recruitment & Eligibility and Other Findings in Region IV

Program fathers were offered:

- 20-week father support group
- 12 meetings were structured and covered topics identified as best practice
- 8 meetings were topics the fathers identified or the group agreed upon
- Meals & transportation support
- Some support with navigating systems

WA's Enrollment Effort

- Between December 2008 and October 2010 father enrolled
- Nearly 1,000 fathers were identified as having a child taken into custody
- Impacting nearly 1,400 children, of which 1,155 had a NRF

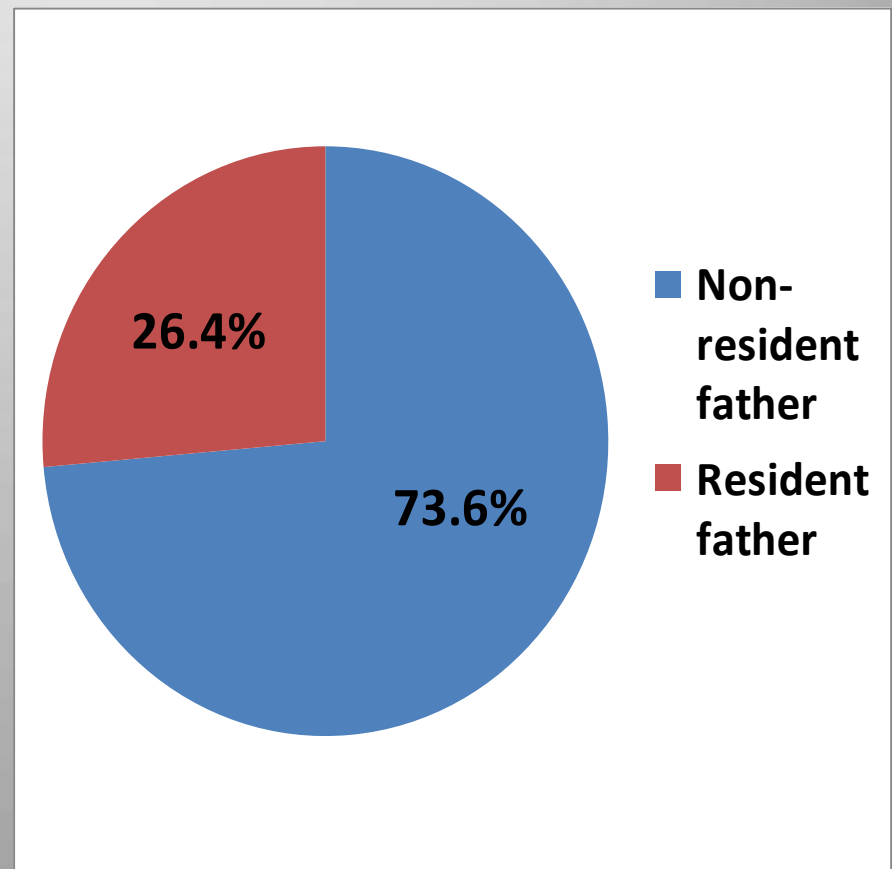
Finding: More children in care had an NRF than initially believed to exist

Good starting point is to know fathering patterning in your area/state

73.6% of all the cases had an NRF, not 50% as was initially thought

- Of the 732 NRFs, 30 were deceased and 22 had their parental rights terminated
- Leaving a pool of 93% potentially program eligible NRFs

Percent of resident and non-resident fathers



Finding: Many NRFs ineligible for program enrollment as set by the funder

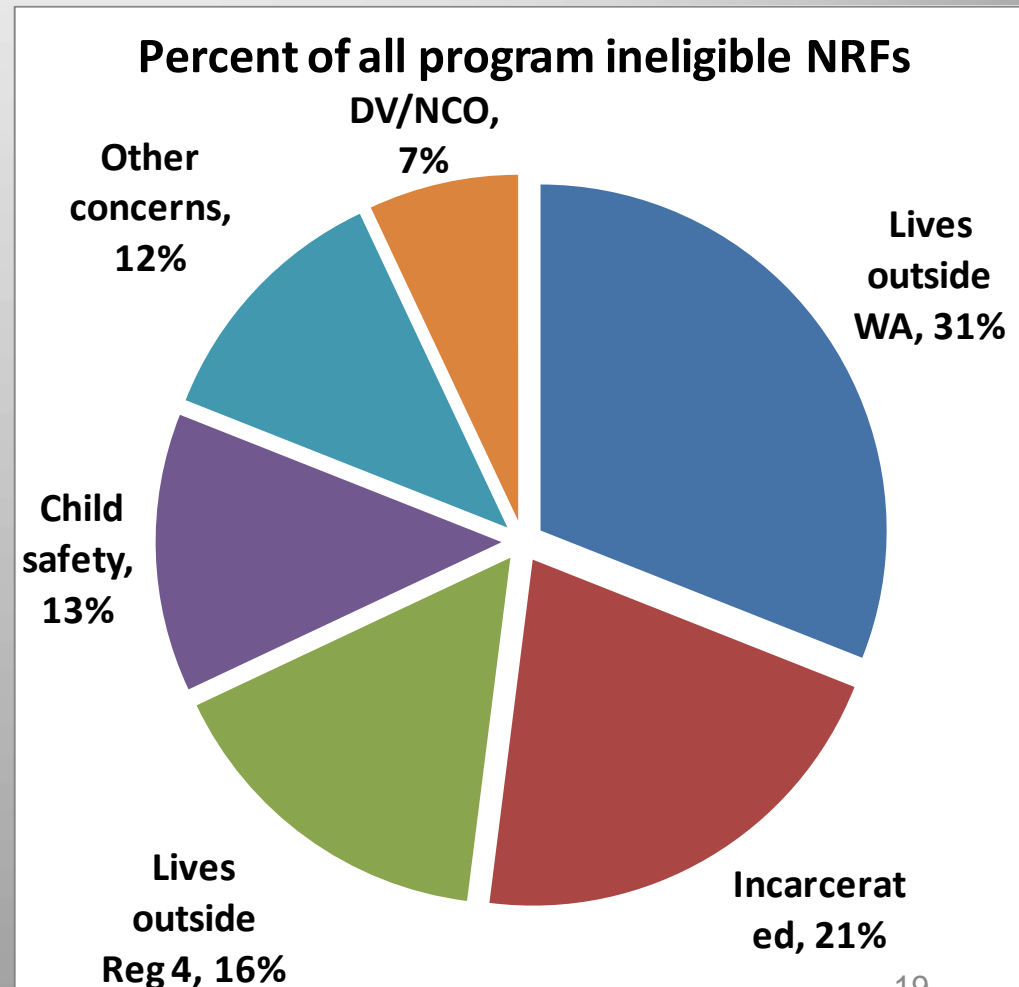
Raising policy & practice concerns, how to serve all fathers

56% all NRFs were not program eligible

■ Percent of “other ineligible” categories

- 4% non-English speaker
- 4% placement prior to study
- 2% current criminal concerns
- 2% severe mental health

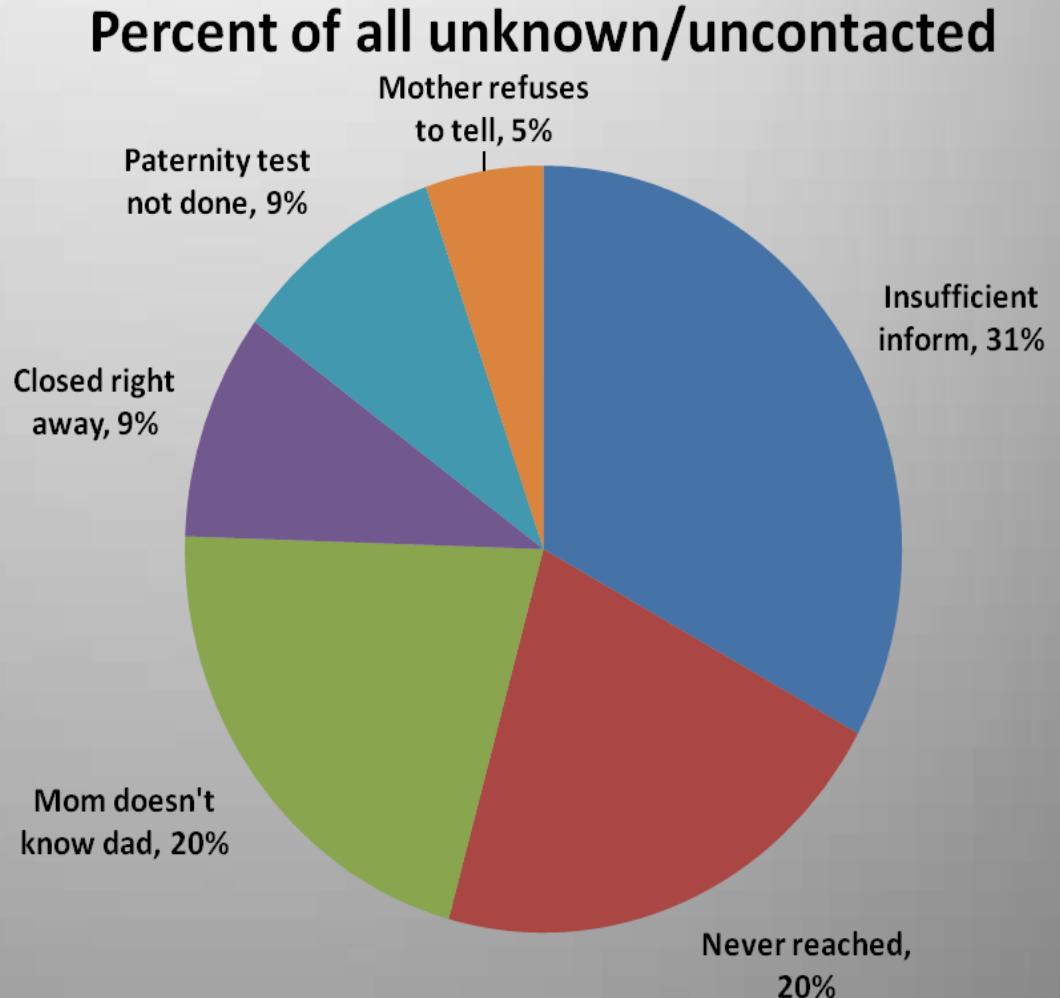
■ Leaving a pool of 37% potential program-eligible NRFs



Finding: A lack of information about fathers is a major barrier to enrollment

Support staff, resource family finding & assess paternity efforts

- 21% of all NRFs were unknown or couldn't be contacted by program
- Leaving a pool of 13% NRFs who could be invited to participate



Finding: Fathers contacted for enrollment were more likely to accept than refuse

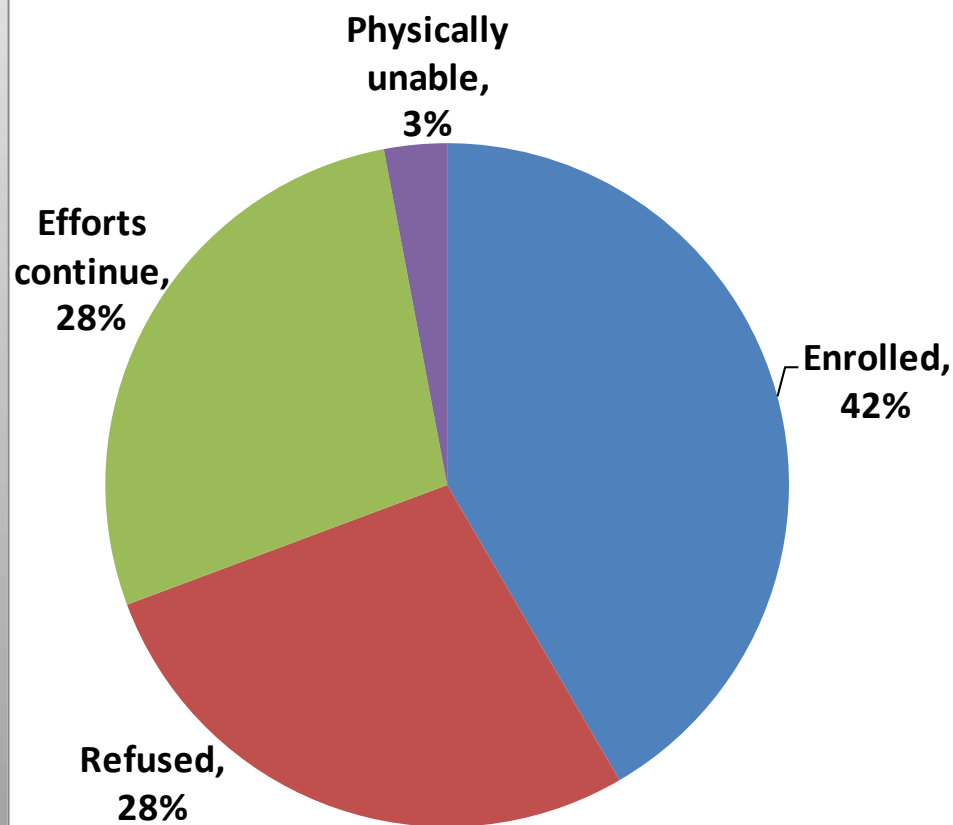
Fathers do want to be supported and engaged

5% of all NRFs enrolled and attempting to enroll another 4%

■ Factors impacting an additional 4% of all NRFs who refused:

- 41% provided no reason
- 19% engaged with other children
- 11% time and distance
- 7% each: work conflict, denied paternity, moving
- 4% child returned home

Disposition of those 13% of all NRFs contacted or still attempting



Finding: NRFs are diverse and many self-identify needs at intake (41 NRFs)

Know in advance who you are serving & planning ahead

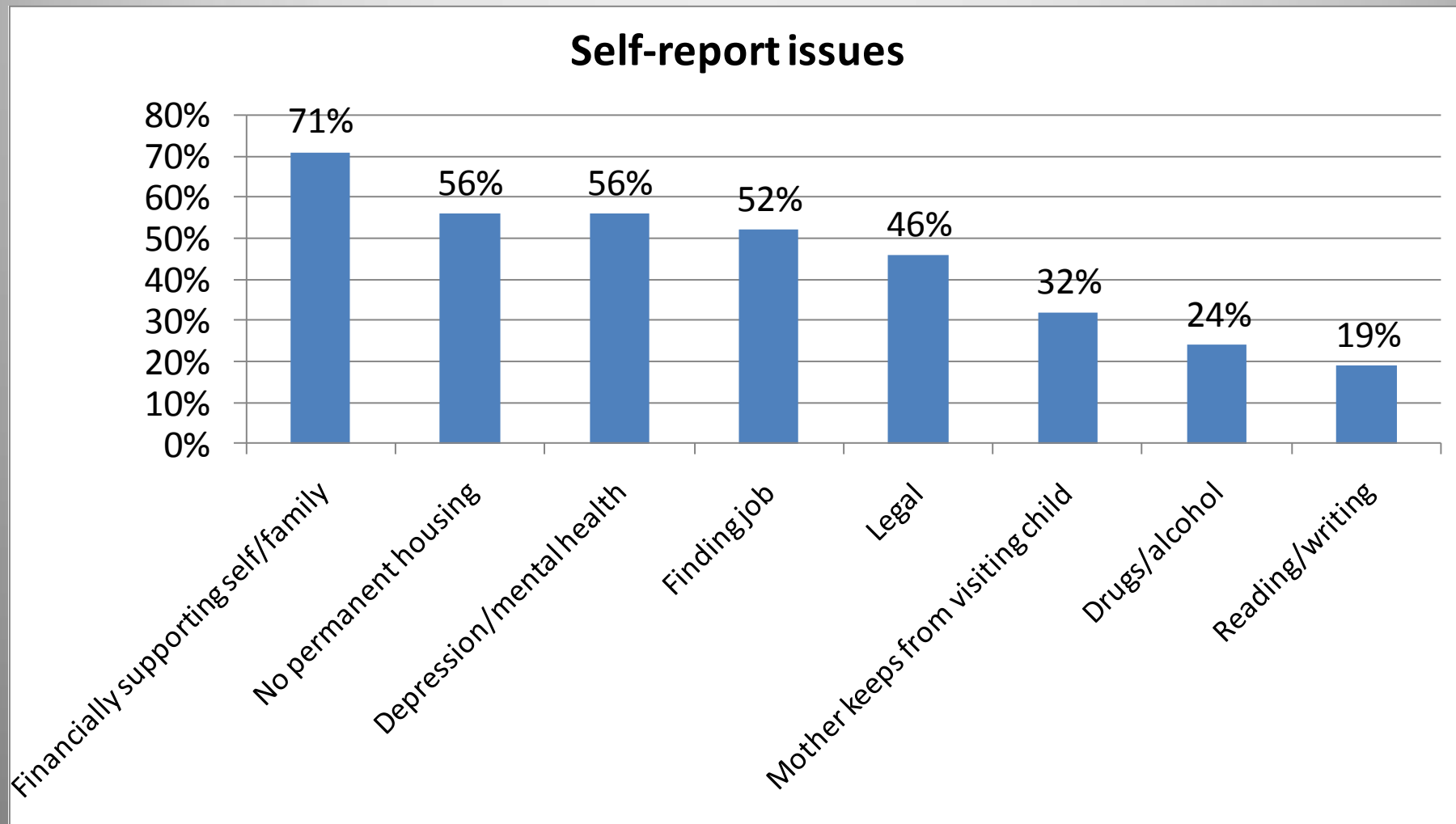
Demographic Information

- **Father's avg. age: 38 years**
- **42% white; 44% African American; 15% AI/AN; 5% Hawaiian/API; 2% Hispanic**
- **Most fathers have one child**
- **Children age range 1 month to 16 years with an average age of 6 years (43% under 3)**

Other Demographic Data

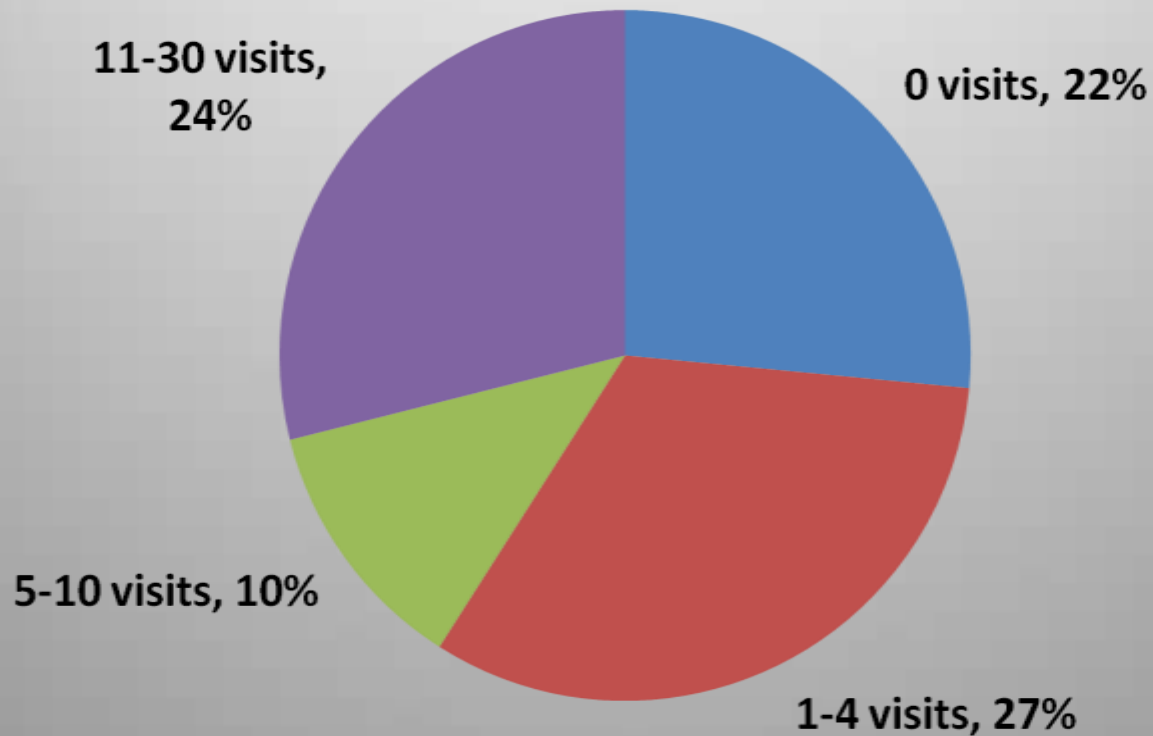
- **Employment:**
 - ✓ 17% employed full-time
 - ✓ 7% employed part-time
 - ✓ 7% unemployed, looking
 - ✓ 29% unemployed, not looking
 - ✓ 9% other
- **Education:**
 - ✓ 27% 11 or fewer years
 - ✓ 71% at least 12 years
 - ✓ 24 % at least 14 years
 - ✓ 2% at least 16 years

Finding: NRFs are diverse and many self-identify needs at intake



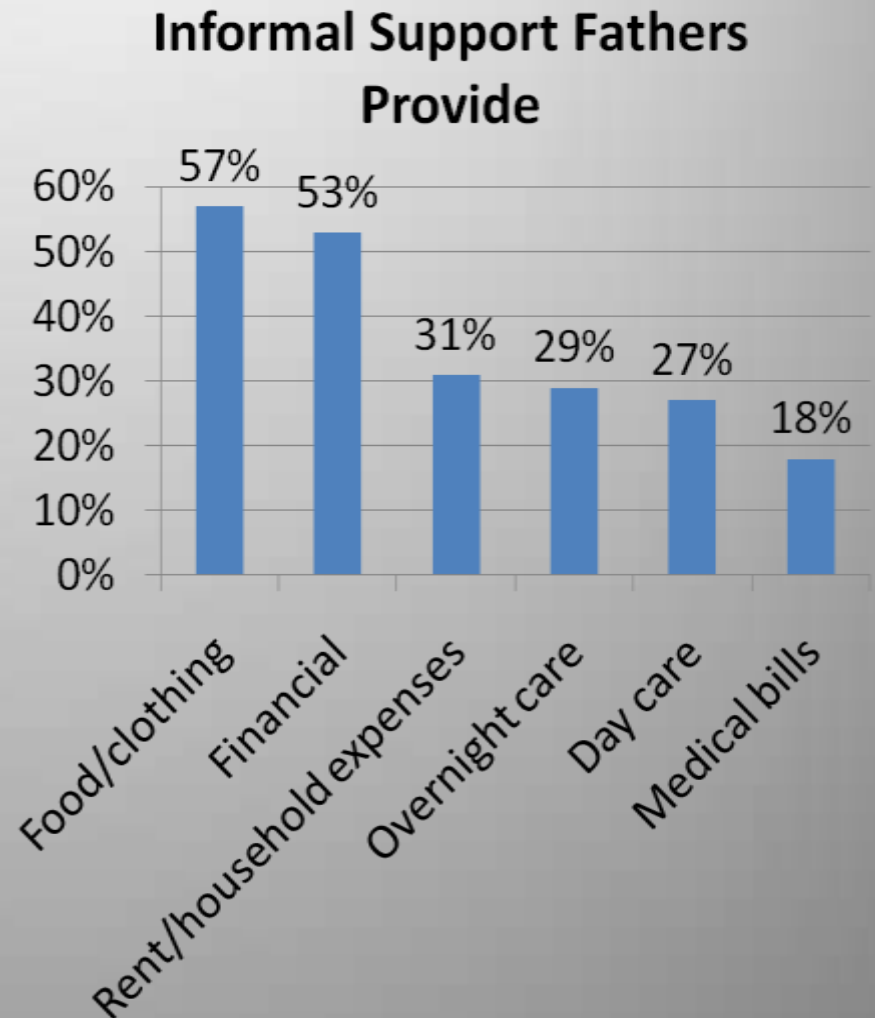
Finding: Most NRFs visited with their child prior to placement

Number of visits per month



Finding: Fathers have a pattern of providing some type of support

- 17 fathers (43%) report having contact with child support enforcement
- Of those 17:
 - 58% don't pay
 - 24% pay sometimes or pay some
 - 18% always pay



**Select findings, recommendations,
and project adjustment slides
presented after the Dialog/Question
slide.**

*Dialog and review of these slides
should time permit.*

Recommendations:

What a Father Values

- **Initial contact takes place where dad is comfortable**
- **Opportunity to tell his story and to be heard (mother's story often heard)**
- **Learn about the supports and services available to help him provide for child and family**
- **Access to father-friendly easy to read and understand information from all the systems (child welfare, child support, legal)**
- **Seamless referral process and confirmation that his needs were met (e.g., housing, financial support, employment and training, child support, legal and criminal systems)**
- **Persons to help him navigate the system and prioritize demands**

Recommendations: What a Father Values

- **Early and consistent engagement—reduce sense of “lost-ness” and frustration when father is engaged after initial court hearings**
- **Accommodating father’s work schedule for meetings, appointments, and visits with his children**
- **Opportunity to give back and offer his insights: serve on father advisory panel, review documents, policies, practice approaches, and training materials**

Recommendations to Staff

- **Be aware that fathers view:**
 - Father view staff as “gatekeepers” and may wait for instructions
 - personal contact with staff is regarded as encouraging
- **A little “hand-holding” up front may result in increased participation by fathers**
- **Explain the paperwork and help him to prioritize**
- **Be honest with fathers about their rights to and responsibilities for their children**
- **Address potential frustrations about why they are required to work with the child welfare and court demands if they were not part of the maltreatment**

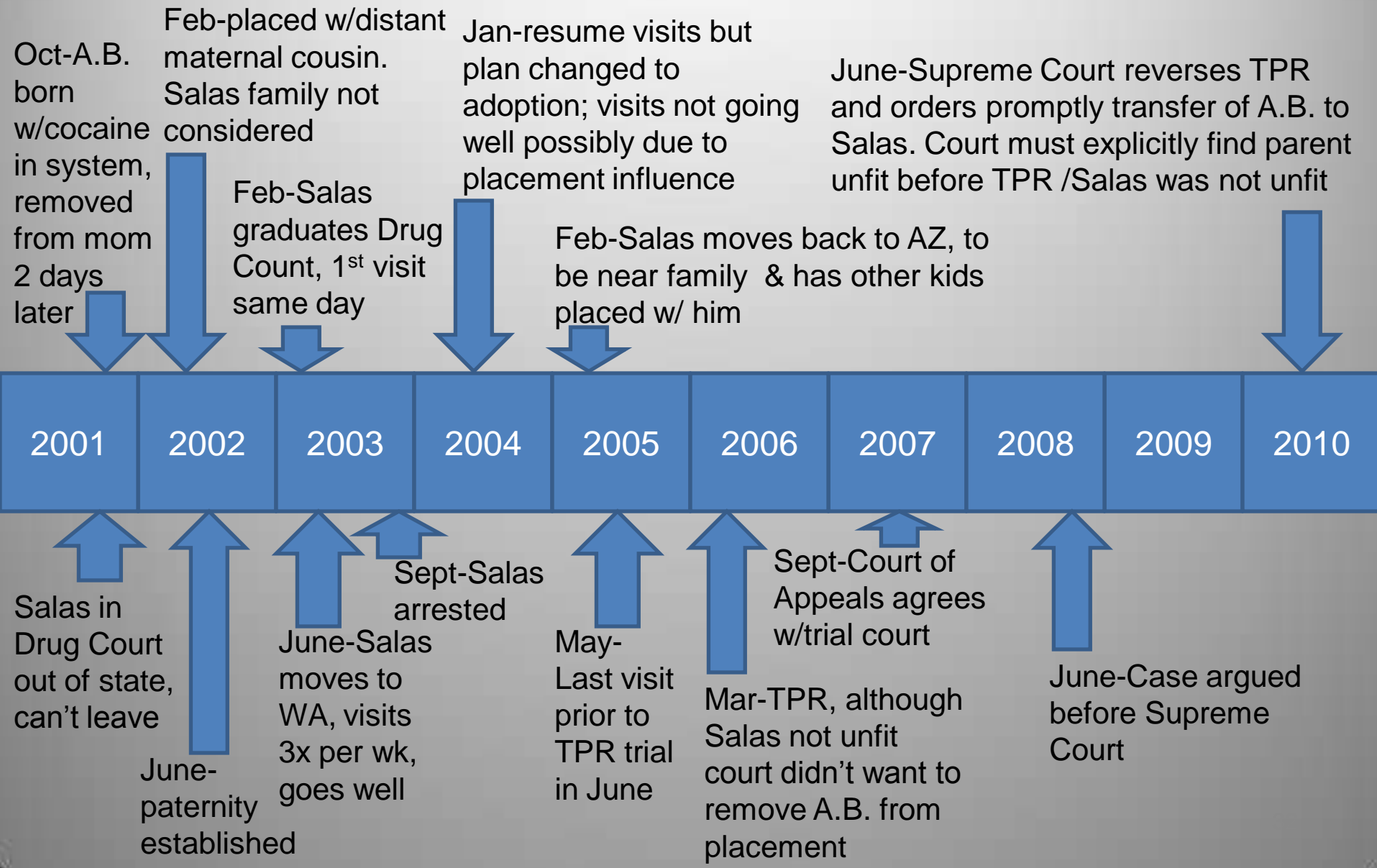
Recommendations to Staff

- **As with mothers, work with fathers to provide the supports and services they need, including father peer support and educational groups**
- **Learn more about male help-seeking behaviors and how you can better provide support**
- **Know fathers love their children—don't judge even if they do not participate in process or appear angry**
- **Many fathers have good intentions as well “starts & stops”**
- **Examine/be prepared to change your own beliefs, values, fears, and thoughts about the role of fathers—reach out to fathers you know and trust for insights**

Legal Recommendations

- Assure early appointment of attorneys for all parents, including non-custodial fathers
- Assure that parents' attorneys do not have inordinately high case loads, and that they receive adequate compensation
- Provide attorneys legal training, available at:
 - www.fatherhoodqic.org/curriculum.shtml
- Address mothers' inability/unwillingness to identify or help locate the father (have her file an affidavit, be examined under oath)
 - Judge Edwards' 4 videos: identifying/locating fathers; establishing paternity; explaining rights /responsibilities; engaging father on the www.fatherhood/qic.org site
- Address legal issues that stop fathers from coming forward, such as fears regarding child support obligations, immigration status, criminal history

WA Supreme Court reversed TPR since trial court did not find Mr. Salas unfit



Court of Appeals found ICPC doesn't apply to parent; allow placement w/ fit father

July - D.F born. Paternity establishes Mr. Verner but no parenting plan

Mar - D.F. removed from mom. DSHS doesn't know Verner's whereabouts. Unclear what efforts taken. Dep. established in Apr.

Apr-Verner addresses OK concerns & makes 2nd ICPC request because he only has 2 bedroom home.

Aug-Court of Appeals agrees with Trial Court. Holds that ICPC does not apply to parents.

2005

2006

2007

2008

2009

2010

DSHS has concerns about mom (neglect & drug use). Mom enters into a voluntary service plan and fails to comply

Apr - After dependency, Mr. Verner finds out his child is in foster care. Finally served w/petition. ICPC requested & denied. OK wanted parenting class & employment

June – Trial Court places with father. Mother appeals.

Recommendations for Agencies, Systems & States to Support Engagement

- **Assume all fathers want to engage; male socialization, a father's childhood or adult experiences may necessitate active outreach**
- **Educate professionals and the broader community on the value of father involvement (via trainings, workshops, panels)**
- **Provide staff with concrete ways to identify, locate, and engage dads/paternal relatives via trainings and tip sheets**
- **Support father and paternal search efforts via tools, information access, or family finding staff; Agency management should consistently enforce policies**

Recommendations for Agencies, Systems & States to Support Engagement

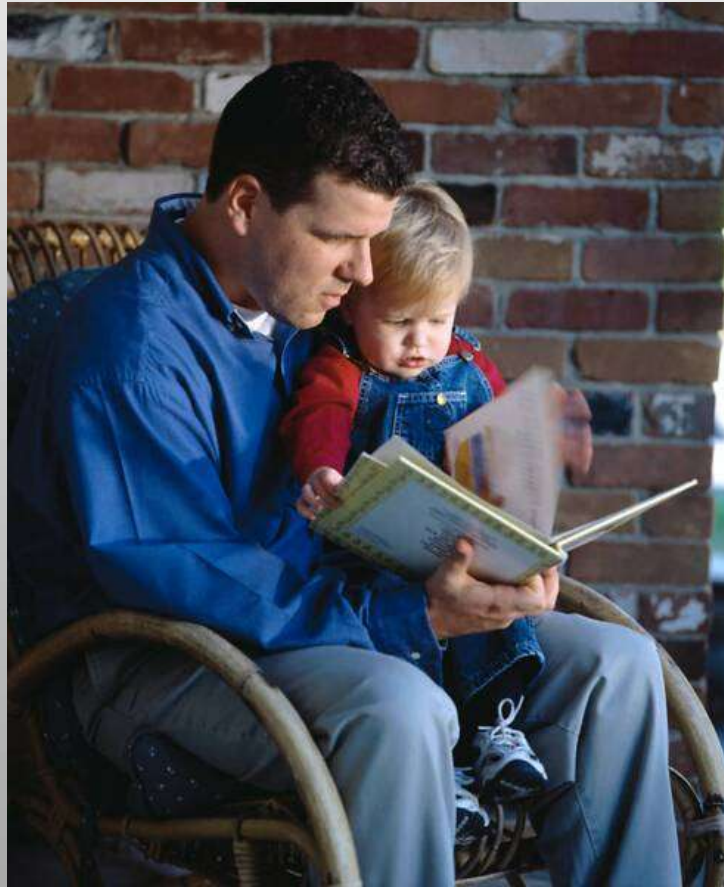
- Review policies, practice, and training materials (including language used) to ensure they are inclusive and specifically name fathers as well as mothers
- Enforce timely paternity testing practices
- To the extent legally possible, implement policies and practices that support the streamlining of intake information, information sharing, referrals, and service delivery
- Educate mothers on the value of father engagement—for buy-in and to access to information about the father
- Consider veteran father mentors and specifically-trained father support personnel to aid and support fathers

Recommendations for Agencies, Systems & States to Support Engagement

- **Create upper level program manager to: enhance father involvement within the agency and cross-system**
- **Create a local, regional, and state-wide fatherhood father advisory panels to review documents, policies, practice approaches, and training materials, and offer insights on ways to identify, locate and engage fathers**
- **Partner with other local, regional, and state-wide fatherhood coalitions and work with public and community providers as well as father and mother representatives**
- **Incorporate evaluation into your efforts—start with a needs assessment study and ongoing data collection for internal use and to fill the knowledge gap**

A Father's Perspective

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6l2dUPZ8X-M>



Resources

■ Currently Available

- ABA Legal training & Advocating for Nonresident Fathers in Child Welfare Court Cases book
 - ABA Service Center at 1-800-285-2221
- Your Legal Rights as a Father-WA has a framework to share
- Lots of research, inform & organizations just Google
 - <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/chaptereight.cfm>
 - Father Friendly Check-Up™

■ Available at Project End

- An adaptable Father Support Group curriculum
- Social worker/professional training and video
- Final process & outcomes reports (each site and cross-site)

Discussion and Questions

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Recruitment Challenges:

Program Level

- **Lack of access to current information on NRFs**
- **Insufficient information on NRFs whereabouts (7-15% of all NRFs) or clear paternity (9% of all NRFs)**
- **Most NRFs did not meet eligibility requirements set by project funder**
- **Overwhelmed child welfare staff needing to identify, locate, contact, engage fathers**
- **We could only offer one program approach to the fathers; not always the best match given their situation (e.g., out of state/region, incarcerated, etc.)**

Recruitment Challenges: Agency and System Levels

- **Culture/environment doesn't always value fathers or know how to show it**
- **Lack of father-specific and father-welcoming services to refer father**
- **Lack of coordination among various systems serving fathers**
- **Unequal application of policies and practices with fathers compared to mothers**
- **Fathers fearful and distrusting of systems**
- **Crises in fathers' situation makes it hard for them to prioritize or navigate systems without supports**

Retention Challenges

Program level

- Fathers present many challenges and competing priorities; they feel overwhelmed or unable to maintain participation
- One program delivery approach doesn't meet the needs of all fathers
- Length of program may be hard when fathers have limited hope and resources and trying to meet basic needs

*About 50% retention rates;
appears to be improving with time.*

Program Adjustment Recommendations

- **Reduce number of weeks to 12 weeks or**
- **Divide material into two classes**
 - 1st focus on understanding the systems – at the same time building trust (3-4 weeks include legal, child support, child welfare)
 - 2nd focus on self-awareness and skill-building such as parenting, child development, employment, etc
- **Implement an information approach to connect with fathers based on individual situations (e.g., lives out of area, incarcerated, DV issues)**
- **Serve all fathers not just NRFs; adjust curricula**
- **Develop less of a stand-alone program; more integration into the agency or community program**
- **Provide supports and services prior, during, and after program**

Program Adjustment Recommendations

- Enhance systemic processes to promote the programs (referral reminders, supervisory enforcement regarding father engagement, father presentations, the sharing of research)
- A systematic, automated, timely approach to father information
- A formalized system for an exchange of information between the group facilitator and a point of contact within the child welfare agency for case-specific concerns and needs
- Ongoing dialog at all levels of the organization about father engagement and programming is required